

BUSH TRUCKERS ON WINTER ROADS

AN AMAZING ADVENTURE IN THE FROZEN WASTES OF CANADA PART 2

In last month's issue we revealed how Russell Fowler, chief executive officer at FuelDefend, was invited to take part in a gruelling trip across the wastelands of Canada with a group of hardened truckers. In his first report, we met his colleagues and were given a fascinating insight into their personal lives. Here in Part 2 of his tale, Russell tells us more about his travels and some of the places he visited.

Hell on earth for a Winter Road trucker at about the 315 kms mark and some 20 kms from the Tadoule Lake Village; The Big Dipper, Left Elbow, Right Elbow then monstrous Hairpin Hill at 58.647789, -98.732429. Travelling in from the north-west the driver is confronted with a series of steepening hills, then the Big Dipper where the truck and trailer plummet into a steep dip and to be faced with another climb seemingly before the end of the trailer has reached the bottom of the dip, turning then into a gentle right

hand bend before a very tight left hander and a steep drop into the stream valley linking Shewfelt Lake some kilometres and a interlinking small lake on the northern side with the large Merrifield Lake, passing a narrow bridge picking up enough speed to run at a steep climb with a right hand bend, large granitic blocks defining the inner curve, before flattening out after 100m, giving time enough to push to maximum speed before launching at a tight left hand bend and a run up a steep hill for a few hundred metres, curving left again as momentum disappears before reaching the wide flat crest of the hill. On our run Derek's lead truck, a day or so ahead, got stuck on the very tight right hander at the base of the big hill, causing Steve leading our two truck convoy to brake hard after the sharp left hander before the base of the hill, while immediately alerting Henry on the CB to hit his brakes, causing Henry to get stuck in the middle of The Big Dipper. Six hours later, seven more



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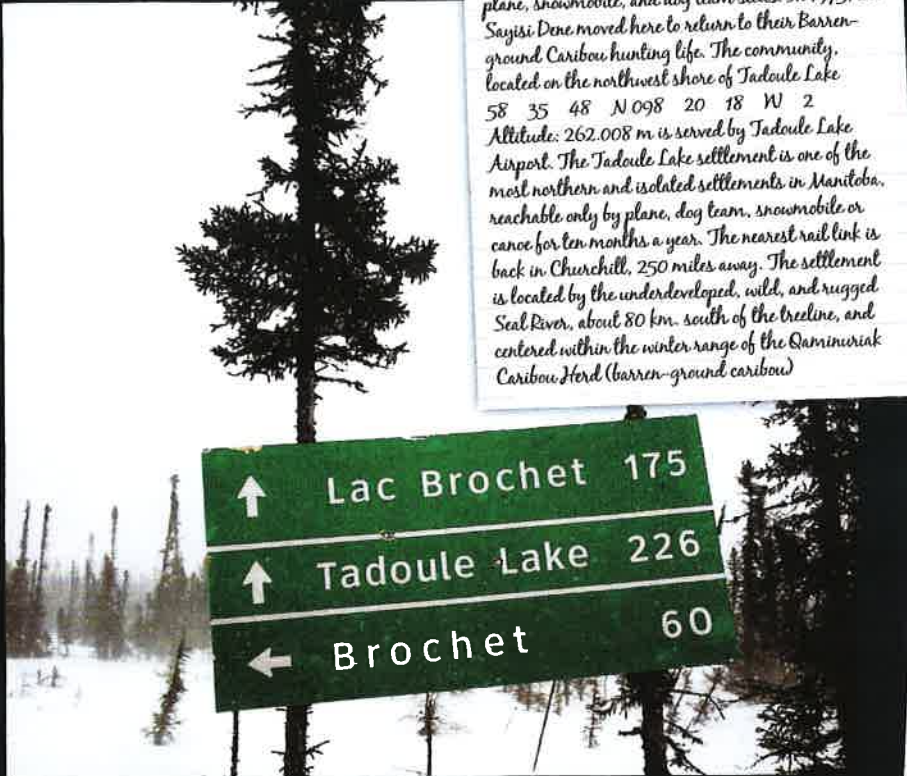
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Tadoule Lake
 (pronounced Ta-doo-lee, derived from the Dene ts'ooli, translated as "floating ashes") is an isolated northern community in Manitoba reachable by plane, snowmobile, and dog team sleds. In 1973, the Sayisi Dene moved here to return to their Barren-ground Caribou hunting life. The community, located on the northwest shore of Tadoule Lake 58° 35' 48" N 098° 20' 18" W 2. Altitude: 262.008 m is served by Tadoule Lake Airport. The Tadoule Lake settlement is one of the most northern and isolated settlements in Manitoba, reachable only by plane, dog team, snowmobile or canoe for ten months a year. The nearest rail link is back in Churchill, 250 miles away. The settlement is located by the underdeveloped, wild, and rugged Seal River, about 80 km south of the treeline, and centered within the winter range of the Qaminuriak Caribou Herd (barren-ground caribou)

Lynn Lake
 is a small town in the northwest region of Manitoba, Canada, 1,071 km from Winnipeg. The town was named after Lynn Smith, chief engineer of Sherritt Gordon Mines Ltd. There are numerous outfitters in the Lynn Lake area. They offer services for most wilderness experiences, including sport fishing and bear and moose hunting. Lynn Lake was founded in 1950, when a deposit of nickel ore was discovered. The nickel mine was developed and soon after, gold was also discovered. Most of Lynn Lake's 208 houses and commercial buildings were moved from Sherridon, Manitoba, over cat train trails. The houses and commercial buildings were moved by digging out the foundation, loading them on the bicycle winter freighting sleigh pulled by Linn tractors and caterpillar crawlers. The buildings once loaded were the last sleigh on the cat trains which were usually 4-5 sleighs long. The Linn Tractors were used to move the town of Sherridon, Manitoba to Lynn Lake, Manitoba in the 1950s. After a rich vein of copper ore had been nearly depleted in Sherridon, the company sent out prospectors to find another strike. Around 1945, the expeditions were successful when one of the world's largest nickel strikes was found near the soon to be established Lynn Lake. Most of the people of Sherridon moved to Lynn Lake when housing was completed. Gold mining was once the major industry of the town. The mine was shut down in the late 20th century, but if the price of gold and other metals rises enough, mining operations could be resumed. The 1996 census recorded Lynn Lake's population at 1,038. By 2001, the population of Lynn Lake had dropped 32.7% to 699. As of December, 2004, the population of Lynn Lake has stabilised somewhat at an estimated 800 residents, 208 of which are students at West Lynn Heights School. The census of 2006 found a population of 714 and that of 2011 found 482 residents.



trucks in our convoy caught up. Part-Native Indian Derek was well ahead and had a reputation for driving very hard and long, but had been stuck for some days. Not knowing when, nor whether, the rest of the convoy would catch up, Derek decided a long walk to the Tadoule Lake, knowing the area well. The skies were laden with snow but little was falling. After several hours the blizzard came in from nowhere, leaving Derek in great difficulty to find the track ahead.

For three or four hours he pushed on before glancing back to see a wolf crossing the road behind him, then noticing one to his side, then becoming aware of perhaps six or eight wolves. Derek knew he could not sit to rest and so pushed on for several more hours until coming to the Tadoule Lake village and summoning help. Several 4x4s returned him to his stranded truck, but attempting with no luck to extricate him. That's when we caught up with Derek.

They returned to the village arrange a large exactor to make the journey, arriving some four or so hours later. The huge machine took an hour to drag Derek up to the straight flat section half way up the large hill. I returned to Steve's truck. He reversed back only 20m up a

slight incline before the wheels spun. Steve launched the truck into full speed over the narrow bridge and up the first section of incline before yanking hard to the right around the large granite outcrop, desperately trying to keep momentum up until the slope levelled off and the road ▶

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straightened, before pulling in behind Derek on a wide section of cleared space. The excavator passed heading south 500m to rescue Steve from the Big Dipper and 20 mins later he was alongside on the level section. The rest of the convoy would follow. Derek then had a run along the flat to the big left hander before climbing The Hill, but failed, having taken too wide

a line and losing momentum as he steered left. Derek reversed, pulled into the side and offered Steve the chance. Steve took a long run up with foot flat to the floor and tight to the right, then gently angling to the left aiming directly at a larger long iced covered rock outcrop to cut the corner, the truck being launched and the trailer bouncing even with

full load of cement as it rode the granite, myself braced hard but still being flung around, facing the long climb up with full momentum, which gradually disappeared over the next few hundred metres. Steve still foot to the floor and worrying that his speed was faltering, then rapidly running down the gears until we reached the flat and the straight on the ridge of the hill.

The ridge road was wide and the Northern Lights were dancing. Following Steve's line on the corner, Henry emerged some ten minutes to catch us up for the final short leg to Tadoule. It was about 10:30pm and we aimed to be in the village within the hour, striking NW and passing to the north of Edmondson Lake and another equally large unnamed lake.

ROADS LIKE NO OTHERS YOU'VE EVER SEEN

Tarred road for 740 kms north then north west from Winnipeg on the main highway 6, being a single track for most of its length and refuelling at Wabowen. Wide gravel road from nickel mine town Thompson north west to Lynn Lake on the 391 past the Nelson House Indian Reserve, weaving between Rat Lake and Granville Lake to Leaf Rapids, stopping at junction to check the security of four WD fork lift truck and the two trailers of 2 tonne cement bags, which tend to settle and require strap tightening. Light covering of snow and ice on the roads arriving at Lynn Lake, passing The King of Obsoletes' snow-covered homestead on its outskirts. Lynn Lake lies in Manitoba, about 50kms east of Reindeer Lake and the Saskatchewan border.

Another gravel road, much narrower, north west, along the ridge, passing the frozen Zed Lake and around to the northern tip of Vandekerckhove Lake (named after PO. G. P. C. Vandekerckhove, of Stony Mountain. (In July 1947 Manitoba named 25 lakes after 26 men who lost their lives on active service in the Second World War) to the beginning of the Tadoule Lake Winter Road. Road 394 begins in Lynn Lake, Manitoba at roads 391 and 396. The road begins northward, intersecting with PR 398, which dead ends soon after beginning at 394. The road then doesn't intersect until its terminus at the Saskatchewan border near Kinoosao, where it becomes Highway 994. 394 in its entire length of 60.3 miles (97 km) is in the Marcel Colomb First Nation.

